

The public airwaves are a public good that we regulate because, among other things, they raise public consciousness about important public issues. This is a vital function in a democratic society, and it should be met in a democratic way.

By forcing local affiliates to pre-empt prime time programming in order to air "Stolen Honor," the Sinclair Broadcast Group is, in effect, pre-empting the democratic function of broadcasting itself. If "Stolen Honor" were as worthy as worthy of being broadcast as Sinclair seems to believe it is, couldn't we trust local affiliates to make the decision to air it themselves? A broad consensus has emerged across the political spectrum that Senator Kerry's military service has already been unfairly distorted by the Swift Boat Veterans debacle. By its own actions, Sinclair has decided that it knows better than the public and its own affiliates and that the overriding function of its stations should be to serve its own political motives. Furthermore, with just two weeks before the election, the deceptions of "Stolen Honor" are unlikely to be adequately revealed. The result will be damage both to our political process and to the mass media, which, properly regulated, can be a valuable public service.